

EMBARGOED UNTIL  
7:13 AM ET TUESDAY  
FEB. 22, 2022

# ANNUAL WARRIOR SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY







# BACKGROUND

## ABOUT WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is a leading veterans service organization focused on transforming the way the post-9/11 generation and future generations of veterans are empowered, employed, and engaged in our communities. Our direct service programs, advocacy efforts, and collaboration among best-in-practice veteran and military organization advance WWP's vision: to foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation's history.

**WWP programs, services, and advocacy efforts are all driven by the greatest needs of warriors, informed by the responses to this survey.**

## ABOUT THE ANNUAL WARRIOR SURVEY

Wounded Warrior Project's 2021 Annual Warrior Survey has grown to represent over 152,000 injured post-9/11 veterans across the continental U.S. and its territories. This data provides a 360-degree view of the warriors WWP serves and allows us to track and treat warriors' most pressing needs in areas such as mental, physical, and financial wellness. It guides WWP's efforts as well as the efforts of those who share and support our mission of honoring and empowering warriors.

The 2021 WWP Annual Warrior Survey is the 12th annual administration of the survey. The 12th Annual Warrior Survey has transitioned from a cross-sectional census (for which WWP previously attempted to collect data from all warriors) to a longitudinal sample survey (which follows the same warriors over time).

**Download the Comprehensive Report of Findings at [AnnualWarriorSurvey.com](https://www.annualwarriorsurvey.com) for more information about survey design, methodology, sampling, and administration.**



WWP is honored to thank CSX for funding the research reported by the Annual Warrior Survey. Through their Pride in Service initiative, CSX is dedicated to connecting our nation's heroes and their families to the resources they need and providing them with the recognition they deserve.



**“The Annual Warrior Survey is something I participate in to help maintain my voice as a veteran. I feel we’re the first generation of veterans that is getting noticed, and I wholeheartedly believe that it has to do with this survey.”**

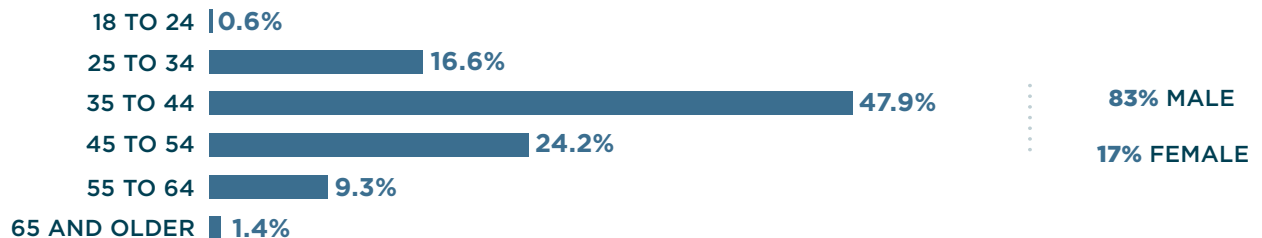
— Connor Moore, Wounded Warrior

## WHO THIS REPORT REPRESENTS

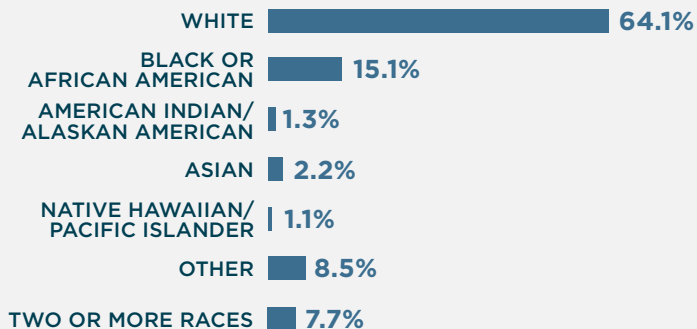
**152,499** WARRIORS REGISTERED WITH WWP



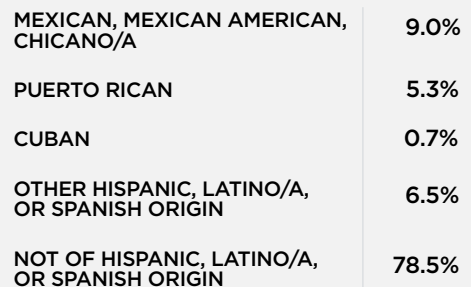
### AGE GROUPS



### RACE



### ETHNICITY



*Note: Hispanic origin is considered an ethnicity, not a race. The population that is Hispanic may be of any race*



# WHOLE-HEALTH WELLNESS AND HEALTH CARE

## INJURIES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

**93%**

of warriors receive VA disability compensation.

**77%**

of warriors have a service-connected disability rating of 70% or higher.

### CHRONIC PAIN



**97%** of warriors reported some level of pain.

**77%** of warriors indicated some degree of **high-intensity to severely limiting** pain.



Important daily activities, such as exercise, can be more challenging for warriors with chronic pain.



Warriors with chronic pain are significantly less likely to meet the World Health Organization (WHO) physical activity guideline recommendations, compared to those without chronic pain.

### Met WHO's physical activity guideline recommendations:

**42%**

Warriors with chronic pain

**62%**

Warriors without chronic pain

### TOP 10 INJURIES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

warriors self-report experiencing as a result of their service:

- 1** **78%** Sleep problems
- 2** **75%** PTSD
- 3** **74%** Anxiety
- 4** **72%** Depression
- 5** **66%** Bone, joint, or muscle injury
- 6** **65%** Hearing loss/tinnitus
- 7** **52%** Migraines/chronic headaches
- 8** **35%** Traumatic brain injury
- 9** **31%** Nerve injury
- 10** **15%** Spinal cord injury

**"When I enlisted, I never thought I would get hurt. Being disabled never even crossed my mind."**

Bryan Wagner, Wounded Warrior





The most **frequently self-reported injury or health issue** among warriors was **sleep problems**, which can be a result of both physical and mental health problems.



While **78%** of warriors self-reported sleep problems, **90%** screened positive for poor sleep quality.

Warriors are **more than twice as likely** as the U.S. general population to get less than seven hours of sleep per night.

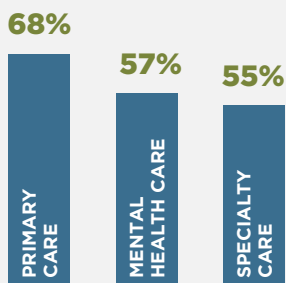
## HEALTH CARE AND COVERAGE

**90%**

of warriors have health care coverage through the VA



Warriors predominantly use VA medical centers for primary, mental health, and specialty care:



About  
**7 IN 10 WARRIORS**  
have utilized telehealth services in the past 12 months.



Of those who utilized telehealth, **81% reported being satisfied** with the services they received.

### Among warriors who do not use VA health care services, the most common reasons cited were:



Prefer to use other health care coverage



Too much trouble or red tape



VA locations are inconvenient



Appointment availability

**41%**

of warriors reported that they had difficulty or put off getting care for their physical injuries or health problems



### Top three cited barriers to physical health care:

**67%**

Difficulty scheduling appointments with provider

**60%**

Delays or cancellation in treatment

**56%**

Lack of availability in VA specialty clinic

**“I definitely would not be where I am today, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, if it were not for Wounded Warrior Project.”**

Bryan Wagner, Wounded Warrior

# MENTAL AND BRAIN HEALTH

## MENTAL HEALTH

Top mental health issues warriors self-report experiencing as a result of their service:



**75%** PTSD



**74%** ANXIETY



**72%** DEPRESSION

Specific assessments were used to determine the percentage of warriors who were experiencing mental health symptoms at the time of the survey:

**49%**

presented with moderate to severe **PTSD** symptoms

**63%**

presented with moderate to severe **anxiety** symptoms

**53%**

presented with moderate to severe **depression** symptoms

**“PTSD has been the hardest injury for me to deal with. A lot of people think PTSD is just freaking out when you hear a loud sound, but it’s deeper than that.”**

Sean Karpf, Wounded Warrior



## WHAT DOES PTSD FEEL LIKE?

### Top PTSD symptoms reported by warriors:

- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Being super alert, watchful, or on guard
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling distant or cut off from other people

## SUICIDE

**16%**

of warriors have attempted suicide at least once in their lifetimes, and the **average number of suicide attempts doubled after military service.\***



Nearly

**1 IN 4** WARRIORS

have had suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months. Of warriors who reported suicidal thoughts, 70% reported having them in the past two weeks.

\*Average number of suicide attempts before service: less than 1. Average number of suicide attempts after service: 2

## MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SUPPORT

46%

of warriors visited a doctor, psychologist, or counselor in the past three months to get help with issues related to stress, emotions, alcohol or drugs, or family.



The likelihood of experiencing PTSD symptoms is **57% lower** among warriors who've maintained the social support of their military friends.

About

**1 IN 5** WARRIORS

reported that they have experienced barriers to mental health care.

The most common barriers are related to attitude and stigma, such as **wanting to solve the problem on their own** and **fears of being perceived as weak**.

## MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

16%

of all warriors have experienced military sexual trauma (MST).

### MST BY SEX:

Women warriors  
Male warriors

67%

6%

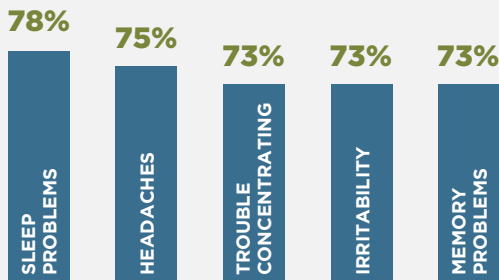
## HEAD-RELATED TRAUMA AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY



**64%** of warriors incurred head injuries

**35%** of warriors incurred traumatic brain injuries\*

Most common symptoms or problems that began or worsened after TBI or other head-related trauma:



### What is a traumatic brain injury (TBI)?

A TBI is characterized as a loss of consciousness or altered mental status caused by a blast, blow, or penetrating force to the head.

Top 3 events or incidents cited as causing head-related trauma and TBIs:

1

Training

2

Falls

3

Blasts/  
explosions

\*Estimated: TBI was defined as WWP warriors who reported being injured as a result of a trauma-related event and lost consciousness immediately following the event.

**“What has helped me is being around other wounded warriors and being able to know that there’s somebody who’s always got my back.”**

Sean Karpf, Wounded Warrior

# TOXIC EXPOSURE

## EXPOSURES AND TREATMENT



**98%**

of warriors report being **exposed to hazardous or toxic substances** during their service



**75%**

of warriors report being **exposed to burn pits**, specifically

**ONLY 9%**  
report receiving  
treatment at the VA  
for toxic exposure\*



### **Less than a third**

of warriors who've filed a VA disability claim for an exposure-related condition have been **granted VA service connection**.\*



“Ever since there has been a military, there has been something that we learned after major engagements that we probably should have done better. We figured these things out, and then we pass that information along. **And for my generation, it's the burn pits.**”

Andrew Myatt, Wounded Warrior  
Photographed 9 months into cancer treatment

## EXPOSURE-RELATED SYMPTOMS AND HEALTH CONDITIONS

Top three **exposure-related symptoms** reported by warriors



**44%**

Decreased ability to exercise



**44%**

Shortness of breath



**33%**

Chest pain

Top three **exposure-related health conditions** reported by warriors



**36%**

Neurological problems



**32%**

Hypertension



**23%**

Chronic multi-symptom illness

\*Excludes active-duty warriors

“The fact that as a community we're actually becoming aware of this and talking about it is amazing.”

Andrew Myatt, Wounded Warrior



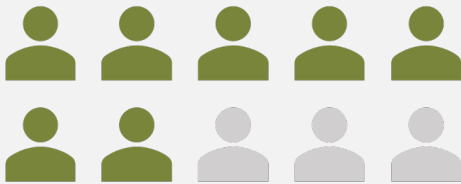
# WOMEN WARRIORS

## MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

About

**7 IN 10**

women warriors have experienced  
military sexual trauma



**65%** of women warriors have experienced sexual harassment and **44%** have experienced sexual assault



Women warriors experience  
**sexual assault** at a rate **2.5X higher**  
than females in the U.S. general population

About **1 in 4** MST survivors believe:

MST survivors  
have different  
perceptions  
of VA care:

**“VA providers are not sensitive  
enough to women’s needs”**

AND

**“There is not enough access to  
women’s services”**

Compared to about 1 in 10 women warriors who haven’t experienced MST.

**“I’m a victim of military  
sexual trauma. The  
things they did — no one  
should endure. I carried  
that with me through my  
military career.”**

Tonya Oxendine, Wounded Warrior

## WOMEN’S HEALTH CARE

**79%** of women warriors use the VA  
for women’s health services

The majority of women warriors who  
use the VA for women’s health services...



are satisfied with the care  
they receive



find the VA to be “very” or  
“extremely” helpful in  
coordinating care

Top barriers to VA care cited by all women warriors:

**20%**

not enough access to women’s services

**20%**

lack of sensitivity to women’s needs

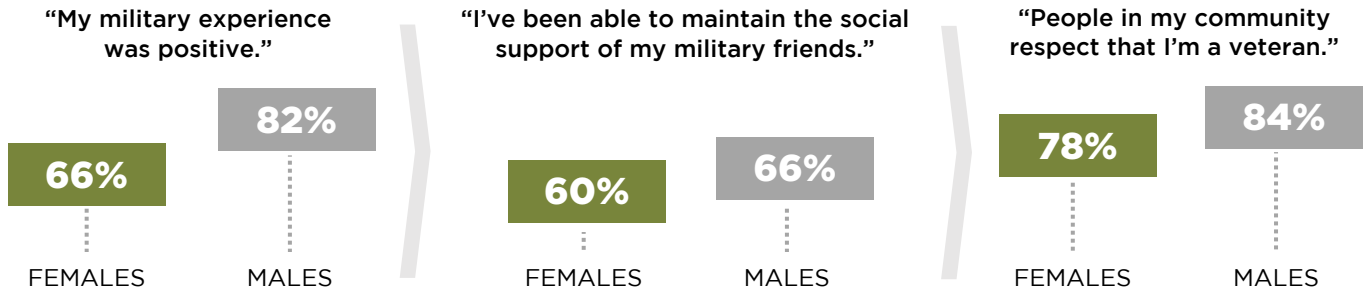
**16%**

geographic location (“VA is too far away”)

**15%** of women warriors report seeking reproductive  
or infertility services. Previous research has shown  
that women service members were **three times  
more likely** to have infertility issues compared with  
women in the general U.S. population.

## WOMEN'S CONNECTION AND IDENTITY

Compared to male warriors, women warriors view their military experience less positively and struggle more with connection and veteran identity in their post-service lives.



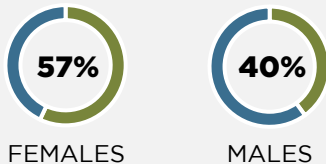
Women warriors were also **significantly more likely** to report being **lonely** than males (71% vs. 61%).\*

## WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



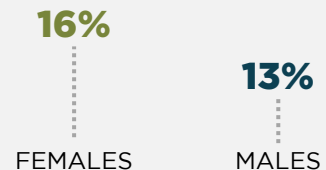
Women warriors are more educated than their male peers.

### BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER:



Despite higher rates of education, women warriors experience higher rates of unemployment than males.

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



Women warriors less often feel respected for their veteran status in the workplace:

**"Co-workers respect that I'm a veteran."**



\*A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the crude relationship between gender and loneliness.

**"Wounded Warrior Project has really helped me build resilience, and I'm not ashamed anymore. I'm strong, I'm bold, I'm courageous."**

Tonya Oxendine, Wounded Warrior

# CONNECTION AND IDENTITY

## LONELINESS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT



**62%** of warriors are lonely.



Warriors who've **been out of military service longer** have **higher overall loneliness scores**.



**65%** of warriors have been able to maintain social support of their military friends.



The likelihood of experiencing PTSD symptoms is **57% lower** among warriors who've **maintained the social support of their military friends**.

To measure emotional support among warriors, the survey included the National Institutes of Health Toolbox Emotional Support Survey.

The average score among warriors (31.8) indicates low levels of emotional support.

Emotional support mean scores:

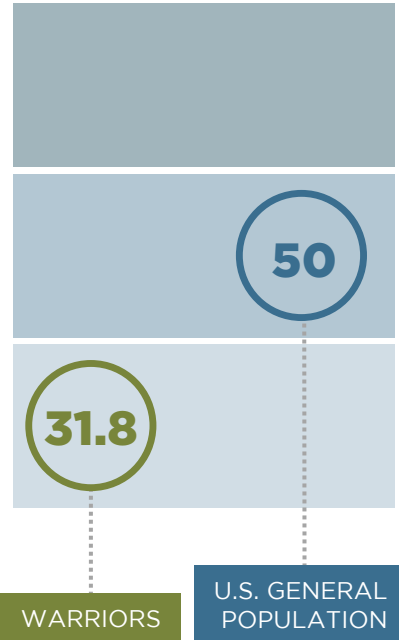
Warriors: **31.8**

U.S. general population: **50**

HIGH

NORMAL

LOW



Warriors report higher levels of emotional support in areas like **having someone to talk to**, but lower levels in areas like **advice when dealing with a problem**.

**"When you're alone, your mind can play tricks on you and lie to you. You can fool yourself into believing that no one understands. That's how I felt."**

Severa Parrish, Wounded Warrior

## VETERAN IDENTITY

**90%**  
AGREE

"People who aren't military don't understand my experiences."

**83%**  
AGREE

"People in my community respect that I'm a veteran."

**80%**  
AGREE

"I view my military experience as positive."

**"When warriors are involved with Wounded Warrior Project, we give each other hope. Individually, we're strong. Together, we're invincible."**

Severa Parrish, Wounded Warrior





# FINANCIAL WELLNESS AND EDUCATION

## EMPLOYMENT

### Unemployment Rate

13%

WWP  
WARRIORS

4%

ALL U.S.  
VETERANS

5%

GENERAL U.S.  
POPULATION

Top barriers to employment reported by unemployed warriors:



44% mental or psychological distress



29% lack skills or knowledge for civilian workforce



24% lack education

Most common industries in which warriors are employed:

30%

federal government

7%

professional, scientific, or technical fields

11%

health care and social assistance

7%

transportation and warehousing

Warriors employed by companies offering a **resource group** or a **veteran mentorship program** had **higher scores of professional fulfillment** compared with those employed by companies without such programs.

**“After service, I struggled with finding stable employment. In too many instances, veterans spend months looking for work after separation.”**

Bill Jones, Wounded Warrior

## FINANCIAL STRAIN

42%

of warriors indicated that they, at some point in the past 12 months, did not have enough money to make ends meet.

**About 1 in 10**

warrior households live in poverty.

## EDUCATION

43%

of warriors have earned a bachelor's degree or higher — making them more educated than the general veteran population and U.S. general population.

15%

of warriors reported that they are currently enrolled in school.

**“The WWP Warriors to Work® program bridges the gap between veterans and employers. I got help with my resume and connected with potential employers.”**

Bill Jones, Wounded Warrior

# INDEPENDENCE AND CAREGIVING

## SUPPORT NEEDED



25%

of warriors need aid and assistance from another person due to service-connected injuries or health problems.

8%

of warriors indicated they are permanently housebound due to service-connected injuries or health problems.

Types of support needed among warriors who require aid and assistance:



**39%** need aid for their **mental health** issues only



**23%** need aid for their **physical health** injuries only



**38%** need aid for **both** their physical and mental health issues or injuries

Challenges that are common among the warrior population seem to be exacerbated for those who require aid and assistance.

Warriors who require aid and assistance report higher rates of:



Suicidal  
ideation



Binge  
drinking



Loneliness



Financial  
strain

Warriors who require aid and assistance report needing an average of



**21-30 hours**

of assistance per week and **30% require 40 hours or more.**

## CAREGIVERS

Warriors' caregivers are:

75%

The warrior's spouse

6%

The warrior's parent

4%

The warrior's child

2%

The warrior's sibling

**"I assist and support my son because of the love I have for him, and I know he would do the same for me without hesitation."**

Christine Schei, caregiver for her son, Wounded Warrior Erik Schei

**"Because of Wounded Warrior Project, my son is able to live in his own home, not in a nursing home."**

Christine Schei, caregiver for her son, Wounded Warrior Erik Schei



**DOWNLOAD THE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF FINDINGS AT**  
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